DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 533 SO 023 303

AUTHOR Macron, Mary
TITLE A Celebration of Life: Memories of an Arab-American in Cleveland. ADC Issues, Issue #7.
INSTITUTION American Arab Anti Discrimination Committee, Washington, DC.
REPORT NO ISSN-8755-903X
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 12p.; For related material, see SO 023 300-302.
AVAILABLE FROM American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 4201 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 500, Washington, DC 20008 ($1).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Arabs; *Cultural Background; Ethnic Groups; *Family Life; *Immigrants; Local History; Marriage; *North Americans; *Social History
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio (Cleveland)

ABSTRACT

This document discusses the life celebrations of Arab American immigrants to Cleveland from the late 1870s. Assembled from what is largely an oral tradition of family history, the booklet describes the home life, weddings, and final partings when elderly relatives returned to the homeland or died in the United States. The economic situation and problems facing the first generation of immigrants included language, religious, and social differences that set the Arab Americans apart from other groups of immigrants. The customs of marriage described include the formalities of betrothal and the consequences of a broken engagement, with the onus usually falling on the young woman in the past, jeopardizing her chances for a second match. The wedding customs include the party given for the bride by the women of both families. The wedding day, ceremony, and feast is pictured in detail. Marriages were arranged. The effect on the bride of moving from her family's home to that of her new husband's family is considered. The importance of songs, dance, and chants are discussed. Ethnic foods, clothing, and customs are described. Life for the Arab immigrant was traumatically different from her/his life back home. From an agrarian society where land often was registered in the names of two or three men who were leaders of the entire community, and where the family was subordinate to the father, the new immigrants were thrust into an industrialized community where everyone worked and where the community leadership did not control the economics of the individual family. (DK)

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ED 363 533

AQ Issues

ISSUE #7

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE: Memories of an Arab-American in Cleveland

A Cleveland Family
Shaheen and Louise Hurley Kaim in Arab Costume
Circa 1900

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The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a non-sectarian, non-partisan service organization committed to defending the rights and promoting the heritage of Arab-Americans. The largest grassroots Arab-American organization in the United States, ADC was founded in 1980 by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk in response to stereotyping, defamation and discrimination directed against Americans of Arab descent.

ADC serves its nationwide membership through direct advocacy in cases of defamation, through legal action in cases of discrimination, and through counseling in matters of immigration. ADC publishes information on issues of concern to Arab-Americans and provides educational materials on Arab history and culture as well as the ethnic experience of Arabs in America. It also sponsors summer internships in Washington for Arab-American college students.

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ISSN 8755-903X

Cover:

A Cleveland Family
Shaheen and Louise Hurley Kaim in Arab Custome
Circa 1900

INTRODUCTION

For most first and second generation Americans, thoughts of our ethnic communities around the turn of the century fill the depths of our identity. While our lifestyles may reflect the American mainstream, we enjoy the legacy of ageless traditions and cultural richness which our grandparents could not surrender as they boarded the ships to the land of "golden opportunities."

Clearly our immigrant fathers found more hardships than gold. Though they were able to survive by hard work and sacrifice, they did not meet with easy acceptance into a society whose core was conspicuously Anglophile. And for most immigrants of that epoch, the struggle for assimilation filled their years and tempered their decisions. Yet beneath these uprooted beginnings lay the courage that built an ethnic structure which adds color to the American ethos, and which quenches our yearnings for roots, for belonging.

The story of the first Arab people to settle in this country is in some ways a textbook case of that immigrant wave which brought millions of new Americans to our shores between 1890 and 1920. The early Arab immigrants left villages and towns in what was then Greater Syria (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine) to settle in East Coast urban centers where they sought Arabic-speaking compatriots who helped acquaint them with their new surroundings and—most of all—to find employment.

What the pioneer Arab-Americans left behind was an existence hardened by widespread food shortages, stagnant economies, repressive political, religious and social doctrines, and lands occupied by foreign armies. Most families sent one or two male members to America with the hope that they would become prosperous and eventually return to the homeland. Most Lebanese and Syrians came to American cities and towns as transients but soon sent for the remaining family members when the dream of return clashed with the newfound prospects for security, freedom, and livelihood.

The experience of the early community matched the challenges and struggles which faced most pre-war immigrant groups. Like their fellow ethnics in the southern European, Slavic, Jewish and Greek communities, the early Arabs came to the U.S. speaking no English, possessing few industrial skills and, for the most part, already saddled with pre-voyage debts and family obligations. The unsettling transition from Arab traditions to American institutions and values was softened by the lingering bonds of kinship, religious sects, and village ties, all of which are at the heart of many existing Arab-American structures.

Yet the Arab immigrant community remained singularly private about its ethnic pride and this stunted the growth of many of its institutions. For the very sources of pride in their Arab ancestry were the same factors which alienated them from the American whole: the richness of the Arabic language translated into names no other Americans could spell or pronounce; their Eastern Christian liturgies or Islamic faith contrasted with American churches, and the Arab cultural heritage differed considerably from the primarily European basis of the culture in the United States.

* * *

The decades prior to the first world war saw the Syrian/Lebanese immigration grow into a community which by 1920 numbered more than 250,000. By that time, the native-born generation ushered the ethnic enclaves into a new era of intense assimilation, business success and job mobility, education, and the embrace of a civic loyalty to their new American nationality. The number of new arrivals dropped severely when wartime legislation set strict quotas on worldwide immigration. Such a scaling down of newcomers facilitated the Americanization process which would permeate the Arab-American community for the following three decades.

It did not take long for the early Arab ethnic colonies to be fragmented by rapid mobility into the geography and ideology of the American heartland. The fact that such a relatively small ethnic group became so widely dispersed had quite an impact on the complexion of Arab-American institutions, cohesiveness, and even identity up through the 1950s. In that interim, spoken Arabic in the homes declined—as did the ethnic press—and many of the Eastern rite churches lost a portion of their faithful to the more accessible Catholic and Protestant congregations. While marriage within the community was still prevalent and desirable between children of the immigrants, most of the third generation had little exposure to their heritage, save the delicacies of Arabic cooking and family names that survived "Anglification."

* * *

The complexion of the Arab-American community changed dramatically in the 1950s and 60s when political and economic upheaval in the Arab homeland created a new wave of emigration to the U.S. Like their countrymen 50 years before, the Arab nationals who came later uprooted their families to find financial and political security which were scarce in their native countries (Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and others). The new Arab-Americans have been spared many of the pangs of acculturation which faced the early arrivals since many of the recent immigrants are better-educated, bilingual, and familiar with the American way of life (which itself is now more "receptive" to pluralism). At the same time, they possess a pride in their Arab ethnic identity which has been nourished by decades of struggle for political independence, by a closer link to Islam, and by a conscious pursuit of linguistic and cultural autonomy within the American mainstream. In addition, the rapid influx of foreign students of diverse Arab nationalities gives further stimulus to the survival of the Arab ethnic identity in this country.

* * *

Today, the Arab-American community exceeds 2.5 million, a population which crisscrosses the nation and has centers in Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Boston, as well as booming communities in California, Texas, and Ohio. It is a community which four generations ago survived by peddling dry goods, opening small stores and working in the textile mills of the Northeast, and now has successfully entered the full spectrum of professional, commercial and political life.

When weighed in America's ethnic balance, the Arab community would probably exceed most others in its undivided loyalty to the American ideals and liberties that for more than a century have won over Arab-Americans' love for the new homeland. Yet what used to be a privately held ethnic identity has in recent years become more public. While this ethnic renaissance has come about for a number of reasons, the most significant remain linked to the immigrant experience itself: second and third generations—fully assimilated—reach out to a heritage that will add depth to a rootless American identity. These traditions of the past will provide our community with a valuable framework for the future.

* * *

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ADC is concerned that this legacy of our immigrant forebearers be both preserved for our community and presented to other Americans. It is with this in mind that we have begun to collect accounts of the Arab-American immigrant experience. The first of these descriptions is presented in this *ADC Issues*.

In her book *Arab Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, Mary Macron writes of Arab-Americans and their age-old customs responding to the powerful tides of Americanization. Three passages have been excerpted from that monograph for publication here. As Danny Thomas notes in his introduction to *Arab Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*, our people have always "retained their pride in the spiritual and cultural traditions of their ancestors. Under adverse circumstances they continued to maintain these traditions in their family life and in their associations. Little has been written about the history and experiences of these people after their immigration to this country." It is this dearth of information that ADC hopes to correct.

Mary Macron, one of ADC's earliest members and strongest supporters, passed away in 1981. ADC is grateful to Cleveland State University's Ethnic Heritage Studies Program for allowing us to reprint Mary's essay as a tribute to her and the Arab-Americans of Cleveland.

Mary's essay was edited for publication by David Hamod.

Helen Hatab Samhan

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE: Memories of an Arab-American in Cleveland

By Mary Macron

In attempting to trace the history of the Arab-Americans in Cleveland, one fact is sadly apparent: the early Arabic-speaking settlers and their first generation children were living their history, not writing or documenting it. Because they were busy with the priorities of making a living, getting an education, and preserving their traditions and customs within the limited boundaries of the ethnic group, much of the history of the first years has unfortunately died with the people who made it.

Life for the Arab immigrant, no matter where he settled, was a traumatically different experience from his life back home. From an agrarian society where land was often registered in the names of two or three men who were leaders of the entire community, and where the family was subordinate to the father, the new immigrants were thrust into an industrialized community where everyone worked and where the community leadership did not control the economics of the individual family.

* * *

Arab immigration to Cleveland is believed to have begun in the 1870s, coinciding with that of the Lithuanians, but no documents have been found to indicate whether many of the first immigrants remained in the city, made their way to other American towns, or, having made some money, returned home to Greater Syria. The greatest likelihood is that these newcomers were itinerant salesmen, peddling their Holy Land olivewood crosses and rosaries and mother-of-pearl artifacts and shrines. Those who came later, in the 1890s, put down the roots which would establish the present Cleveland Arab-American community.

From about 1890 on, the immigration of Syrians to Cleveland escalated until it peaked around 1910. Many of these immigrants were from the agricultural villages and towns surrounding the cities of Beirut and Damascus, the majority coming from the rich and fertile Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, the ancient Coele-Syria. Most came from the towns of Zahle and Aiteneet, while some came from northern Lebanon, Aramoon and Kuba.

There were no olive, fig, orange, or lemon groves in Cleveland, and the apple, peach, and grape industries accepted little help from immigrants, so the industrious Syrian-Lebanese set about to establish themselves in whatever trades they might find. Some went to work in the steel mills, and others in the new automotive factories. They went on road-building jobs and worked for sewer contractors. Some found jobs in carpentry and the housing trades. They began as unskilled laborers, but as the years progressed, they established their own contracting, building, and real estate companies.

From their day laborers' wages they opened grocery stores, fruit and vegetable stands, restaurants and diners, and some dry goods stores. Out of these grew wholesale houses jobbing tobaccos, candy, paper products, appliances and gift items. Large first class restaurants began serving downtown and suburban clienteles, and supermarkets, automobile agencies, and specialty shops sprang up.

Some of the women took their handmade laces and tatting, embroideries and finely sewn aprons, dresses and baby clothes, and, with their children at their side, went to parishes to sell their crafts to more affluent and better-established Americans.

The women found that their domestic skills could be put to use not only for the requirements of the family, but also to add to the family's income. They were accustomed to sewing for their husbands and children. Now they could sew for "rich" ladies and supplement their husbands' earnings.

* * *

From the beginning, the parents, like the East European immigrants, recognized that there was only one direct route which led their children out of the factories, fruit stands, confectioneries and peddling itineraries in which they, themselves, earned their livings. This was the path of education previously denied to the parents by the circumstances of government and class in the mother country. Since education was now open to their children in an American system which fostered learning, the children would one day be doctors, lawyers, businessmen, teachers, and government leaders which their forebearers could never have hoped to become. In the 1890s, gaslight illuminated the little copy books the children studied by, and some of them managed to get through a few grades of elementary school before they had to go to work or marry (as was the case with many of the fourteen- or fifteen-year-old girls). These were, for the most part, not the American-born generation, but those children who had accompanied their parents on the long, hard voyage to America. After the 1900s, when the American-born generation was enrolled in school, more and more young people went from elementary education on to commercial training in two-year high schools, college preparatory courses in private schools, and colleges and universities for advanced degrees.

It was not easy. Economic circumstances did not change rapidly for the first families. Gradually, through struggle, failure and success, the long-sought ambitions were realized. This philosophy was handed down to the younger generations. By inclination, the Arab tends toward self-employment and a desire to be his own boss. So it was in Cleveland.

Those early settlers, like the immigrants from other countries, were a generation of Titans. They were "stronger than ten" in their physical prowess and durability. The women endured hardships, embarrassment, and humiliation with good-naturedness. Both men and women made friends of their skeptical and often inconsiderate neighbors. They rose, step by step, to positions of acceptance, trust, and respect in the community.

These people were themselves trusting and faithful. Their word was their bond. Their basic values were simple, honest, and unaffected. An eight-hour day was a foreign concept to them. They worked in their businesses from dawn to late at night and taught their children that hard work was a proper way of life.

THE HOME

All life centered around the home. The Arab immigrant home—tenement room or back-of-the-store apartment, small house or large, poor or increasingly affluent—was the heart of all the family activities. The kitchen table, the stove in the parlor, the balcony porch or front door stoop, were the gathering places for family and friends. Parents, old aunts and uncles, unmarried brothers, sisters, and cousins shared the family house. Friends from the family's village in the old country could always find a welcome and a grubstake.

Children were born there, the women of the family assisting the doctor. When mothers fell ill, the relatives gathered to cook, launder, and care for the children. When fathers fell ill, the relatives banded together to see that the family did not want. They paid the rent and bought the family's food until the father could return to his work.

On Bolivar Road, phonographs playing Arabic records sounded throughout the street, and the people took part in the simple pastimes of their own Mediterranean cultures. The men, Greeks and Syrian-Lebanese, sat on stools and soda fountain chairs on the sidewalks in front of their stores and engaged in friendly, if somewhat volatile, matches in the *towlee*, that ancient game of backgammon which enjoys renewed popularity today. The boards were exquisitely inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Immigrant craftsmen took pride in producing each piece more elegant than the previous one. Card games were popular. These included *basra*, a form of casino, and, in later years, whist. The children could spend an entire Saturday afternoon in the movie houses for five or ten cents. In the evenings, families visited each other's houses. They came for card parties, to exchange the old country news coming from New York in one of the Arabic language newspapers, to read letters from the village back home, or just to sit in parlors before a stove in winter, reminiscing about life in the village or discussing plans for new partnerships or ventures in this new land.

On summer evenings everyone came out to sit on the sidewalks, to call to each other over tenement balconies, to rock on a porch or front stoop, to sip lemonade flavored with *mazzaher*, an orange flower water, and to nibble at *kahik*, *sambousek*, or *mamouhl*—Arabic pastries. They could be equally delighted with the new tastes of pretzels or American sugar cookies.

A new arrival from the old country meant days of reunion and celebration, with everyone coming to greet him and make him welcome. If the arrival was a young male or female counsin, the visitors came with a speculative eye, knowing that here might be a suitable match for a son or daughter.

THE WEDDING

When a suitable match was made, the community could look forward to celebrating another important institution: marriage. A marriage took months to prepare for and days to celebrate. It was a bond that united not only the couple, but the families, for usually it was the culmination of an arrangement between the families, initiated with meticulous negotiations, all proprieties observed.

The family of the groom would come to the father of the bride to ask for her hand long before the groom was permitted to meet publicly with the girl. Often the marriage itself was preceded by a betrothal ceremony some six months to a year before, in which the young couple would appear before the priest, in the church, in the presence of both families and selected guests.

Certain formalities would be exchanged between the families, promises were made by the young man and young woman, and the priest would bless the engagement ring. Sometimes the young man did not even have the pleasure of slipping the ring on his beloved's finger. This might be done by the priest or the father of the groom.

The betrothal ceremony gave the young couple the privilege of walking out together and being seen in public with a chaperone. They could go to some social functions, shop together for their new household, and get to know each other a little better throughout the year of courtship which would prepare them for the marriage that would follow.

A broken engagement was not to be taken lightly. In such a case, this betrothal, blessed by the priest, had been betrayed, and protocol demanded that the priest himself be required to dissolve the arrangement. Most often, the onus fell upon the young woman and jeopardized her chances for another match. Was she irresponsible? Was she too proud? Was she extravagant? Never mind that a woman of integrity, realizing that this young man was not her ideal mate for a lifetime, might insist upon breaking the contract. Never mind. This girl was considered extremely difficult to please or to understand, too willful, too demanding. Better to look elsewhere.*

As the wedding date drew near, a wave of excitement rippled through the whole community. Everyone knew nearly everyone else, friendships carrying over from the days of village life before coming to America. Customs carried over, too, and tradition was preserved and continued into the new life.

One of these Middle Eastern customs was *el-Leilat el-Ghosal*, when the bride was given a special party by all the girls and women, much like the spinsters' night in the American custom. This was a night when the men were excluded, and they might hold a party of their own for the bridegroom.

The feminine contingent would all bustle down the street to the bride's home, singing that spontaneous chant, the *zaghloot*, which praised the bride's attributes and wished upon her health, wealth, a happy home, a loving husband, and at least a dozen children—most of them sons. The bride's mother would meet them at the door with a dignified welcome, and only after all were seated would the bride enter the room, attended by her sisters and radiant in her new finery.

There would be much laughter. The older ladies, enjoying the feminine intimacy, would exchange stories about their own weddings and their total ignorance of all things connubial. Each would direct a sly remark toward the bride at which all the others would laugh heartily. The bride would blush and they would all laugh again.

"When my own wedding feast was over," said one, "and everyone was leaving the house of my husband's father, I put on my hat and prepared to go back home with my sister. 'No,' she said to me, 'you stay here, this is now your home.' And there I was with a husband I hardly knew. I was tired, and I didn't know where I was to sleep that night." Then with a smile grown soft with years of acceptance, she said, "I soon found out."

And from another: "In my day, there was not all this picking and choosing. They just told us, and that's who it was. Not everyone was as lucky as you, my girl. Think of this one you're getting. Already he has a stand in the market, and look at those shoulders, and those eyes a woman could drown in. I tell you if I were younger, I would run away from my husband if your bridegroom had a brother." "And

*It is interesting to note that this betrothal ritual, much the same in all Eastern rites (although not practiced by later generation Arab-Americans), closely resembled the Islamic ritual which is still universally observed. This is called *Katbit il Kitaab*, the Writing of the Book. It is a marriage contract, in which the young woman and young man are considered man and wife, except that their physical union takes place only after the bride leaves her father's house to enter the groom's home to live. The Muslim young people, too, are accorded in this ceremony the privilege of walking out and going to entertainment together, and preparing, during this year of pre-marriage, their trousseau and home. This contract is even more binding upon them than is the Christian betrothal, for a broken contract is considered a divorce, and the young man must pay to the father of the bride the dowry sum agreed upon so that she will not be forced to remain in her father's home without means and dignity. In times past, it would hve been most unlikely that the girl would get a second offer.

what would you do, old grandmother," laughed another, "hold him in your lap and feed him grapes?"

Before the wedding feast, all the women from the bridegroom's family (for the wedding was given by the man's side) would spend days preparing great trays of sweets—*baklawa*, *sambousek*, *mahmoul*, *ghraibeh*—rich with butter and syrups and filled with pistachios, walnuts or dates. There would be mounds of nutmeats, and candies imported from New York—*raha*, which was similar to the Greek *loukoumi*, and apricot squares, sugared and pistachioed. Long tables would be set up to hold the chicken and pilaf, stuffed grape leaves, *kousa* (white squash filled with rice and chopped meat), and *kibbee* (lamb, pounded and pulverized in a large marble basin, and mixed with cracked wheat and seasonings). Vegetables were scrubbed and washed for *salata*, a salad mixed with lemon and olive oil. Huge round sheets of bread were tossed to paper thinness over the flying arms of the expert women bakers. The bread was baked for the feasting only hours before the great moment.

* * *

On the morning of the wedding, these same women, who had worked through the night over the stoves and ovens, would dress in their finest clothing. With their husbands and children they would form an entourage to the bride's house to bring her to the church. Singing with joy, they would come to the bride's family who would meet them with something less than a show of enthusiasm. It was not proper to demonstrate any overt pleasure when giving up a daughter to another's household. There would be a cool politeness, which the groom's family understood, since they themselves had to observe the same proprieties when the groom's sister married.

The bride's mother would weep and the bride's father would bite his lip as the eldest of the groom's female relatives—his mother, grandmother, aunts and godmother—would troop into the bride's bedroom, where she waited in her fresh, white beribboned underclothing for the ritual which would follow.

All the men would sit together in the parlor, jovial and brotherly now, while the women crowded close in the bride's room for the dressing of the bride. The female elders of the groom's family would toss flower petals on the bride, and sprinkle perfume on her, chanting their happy *zaghloot*. All the women would gasp and utter sighs of admiration as each garment was placed upon the bride by the bridegroom's mother. The underclothing, the camisole, then the petticoats, and finally the beautiful white dress. As the dress went over the bride's head and was smoothed down gently by the groom's mother, the mother of the bride would utter a sigh and shed more tears. This is the little girl I dressed and now another mother takes her from me to her own house, she thought to herself. Oh, will she treat her well, this daughter, whom I guarded from the breath of the wind?

The groom's mother, as if reading these thoughts, would then glance reproachfully at the bride's mother, as if to say, "Have I not a daughter of my own whom I have given to another woman's house? Have no fear, sister, I will bring no hurt to this girl of yours." As if to prove it, she would draw proudly from around her own neck a gold chain, placing it around the bride's throat, a symbol and a promise. The bride's mother would sigh more peacefully now that all the proprieties had been observed.

At last the moment came. The bride remained seated, while both mothers fussed importantly with her veil. Finally, when it had been adjusted to everyone's satisfaction, all the women would chant their happy song and bring the bride out before the entire company. The women of both families would receive flowers from the bridegroom's mother, and the men would also choose some for their lapels. Then the bride, her parents, and the attendants would take their places in the hired carriage and start off for the church.

The wedding was long, for after the lengthy Mass, the ceremony uniting the young couple might last another hour. The rings were blessed with much chanting, and crowns were placed upon the heads of bride and groom—blessed and interchanged three times—as the cantor sang and the priest prayed over them. The priest would then lead the couple around the altar and along the aisles of the church, all the while chanting the nuptual liturgy and swinging the thurible vigorously as the sweet and heavy vapors of incense filled the air.

Expressions of joy were spontaneous and genuine among the early immigrants, their own village habits still strong in them. As the priest completed the ceremony and bent down to congratulate the bride and groom, an exultant *zaghloot* would ring out in the little church, easing the solemnity of the long and symbolic ceremony. "Now good," an old grandfather would be heard to say. "Praise God, we have them married; let's get on to the feast." He would rise up in his pew, giving the signal for all to follow.

* * *

The bridal feast was served in the bridegroom's house by all the women of the family—the old and dignified matrons and every young girl who could carry a platter without spilling its contents. Group after group of diners sat down and rose up

from the table, each in the order of his social position. The bride and groom were seated together at the head, the priest at their side, the fathers, grandfathers, elderly uncles and cousins, the mother and grandmother of the bride, and a few old friends whom time had given a position of community respect. At the first table, too, would be the adult guests from other cities. A Cleveland wedding might draw company from every city in Ohio, and sometimes even from New York, Detroit and Chicago.

The tables were set and reset until all had been fed. At last the children were called, their Sunday clothing dusty from play in the street. Fed and given their share of sweets, they would then join the other guests, seated and standing in a great semicircle around a dias, on which the bride and groom accepted the good wishes of the company.

Men from the groom's family gathered before the bridal couple. The leader waved a handkerchief as the group danced the quick and emphatic *dabke*, the age-old folk dance of every festive occasion. They stood before the young people, their hands upon each other's shoulders, singing extempore. They praised the bride's beauty and virtue, the groom's nobility and manly attributes, and the parents' respect among all their friends. Loud and long, in joyous expression, their voices rang out to the street. Later, the bride's relatives, not to be outdone, composed even longer songs which were more lavish in their praise ,their voices rising to echo and mingle with all the memories of the house.

For so many of those people who could not read or write, extempore versing was a preservation of the poetry and music of generations, each adding, improvising and embellishing. As the first untutored generation died away, these verses were lost. The men rhymed their extempore not only at weddings, but on every festive occasion. They were singers, these men, and poets, and all the human emotions found expression in those strong voices.

The women, too, vied with each other to compose beautiful chants. Rhyming and lilting, laughter and joy were captured on a golden chain of words ending in the pealing, exultant cry of the *zaghloot*. "La la la la lu lu lu l'aishe!" "To life," they sang, "to life." An Arab wedding was not just a family event, a community occasion, and a weekend of festivities. It was, rather, a command performance. Everyone had to sing, everyone had to dance.

Before the immigrants learned to sing the American national anthem, they sang the song of Syrian independence long years before independence became a reality. They sang this song at every wedding, and later generations, who learned not one word of Arabic, can still remember those phrases of patriotism sung out by their grandparents. "Enthee Souria ya biladi." "Thou art Syria, my country." Love songs and ballads from home were sung and tears of remembrance glistened in the eyes of the guests as they applauded the singer.

The *oud*, that pear-shaped instrument, thrummed its plaintive, yearning notes against homesick hearts. It said to the bride and groom, "Young lovers, sing and be happy! Can you know what lies ahead of your feet? Sing and be happy, young lovers, tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow will come only too soon."

Now the *derbecki* took its turn, this old drum with its stretched goat skin. It was tapped, knocked, and slapped with a gentle hand, light and swift. Let it be thumped by fingers that can pull shouts from its throat, and let the young girls dance, their slender arms graceful as the willow in the lake, their feet disciplined in each exquisite turn.

THE PASSING

Just as there were tears of joy at weddings, there were tears of sorrow at the passing away of a loved one. An old grandfather, having stayed a few years, would be leaving America to spend his last moments on his own bit of land, anxious to be buried in the mother soil. When someone, young or old, made plans to return to the old country, the farewell was one of terrible grief. This was a funereal moment, for a return almost cetainly meant a parting forever from the loved ones in this land. The farewells were loud and agonized, and songs of lament would be heard along the street and from the balconies. Because transportation was not a matter of a few hours and money was not had easily, most of those early arrivals had come to spend the rest of their lives in the new country; those who returned, returned forever. How many a small grandchild, sensing that this parting would be forever, ran screaming and wailing down the street, tugging and pulling at the suitcase and carpet bag, pleading with *Jidouh* not to go but to stay, to stay? How many a grandfather tore the sob from his throat in that last embrace?

Letters from the village or town often brought news of an illness or death in the family. Everyone would be sick with anxiety and grief, for this marked another parting and loss, the beloved face and voice to be seen and heard no more, and "here we are thousands of miles across the sea, without a last glance, without a last word."

The elderly family members who remained in America would not go to the hospital, for to go to the hospital meant one was close to death. If one had to die, then let it be in his own bed with his loved

ones standing around him so that he could direct them as to his last wishes and admonish them to be loving and watchful of one another. What they prayed and hoped for often happened. Everyone in the family would come to visit the old one, respectfully kissing the old hand, receiving the blessing from this beloved grandparent.

Wakes were held in the family house. For three nights, the women would sit up all night in the parlor, saying their goodbyes, and remembering all the days of their youth. They would weep a great deal, and then one, to lighten the grief, would make a little joke, or remember something funny that the departed relative had said or done. All the women would smile, concealing their little laughs behind tear-soaked handkerchiefs. They sat on straight, hard chairs, prayed a little, talked a little, and dozed a little, but there was no thought of going to their own house and leaving the bereaved alone. The men, too, sat together, heads bowed, silent and remembering.

Softly, softly, the *zaghloot*, now chanting the attributes of the beloved lost one, and remembering the happier times in this final farewell, would murmur mournfully through the house; all, the men and the women, would fall to weeping.

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